

N.J. Counties (Cumberland article) #7

Newark Sunday News MAGAZINE

Section V

November 16, 1952

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ESSEX COUNTY

Robert Treat and Indian traders of
1666 would never know the old place

(SEE PAGES 12, 14, 15, 16)



Cavalcade of Counties:

**Redskins Yielded
Essex for Little
in 1666; now it's
One of Country's
Busiest and Most
Populous Counties**

BY JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM

ROBERT TREAT, just off the boat from Connecticut, spoke angrily in the warmth of a May afternoon in 1666. He expressed himself flatly as being all for going back to Connecticut and leaving these lush meadows on the shores of the beautiful Passaic to the Indians. Treat argued that Governor Carteret had indicated the land had been bought from the Indians. Now, however, the Indians ordered the Connecticut colonists back to their boats—"no wampum, no land."

Treat stayed, despite his initial anger; the New Englanders settled down pending official purchase of the land in July, 1667, and the eventual transaction ranks high among all-time real estate bargains. The Indians exchanged most of what is now Essex and Union counties for what seems today more like a poll of the personal desires of the braves than a calculated asking price.

Apparently the Indians went off in high glee with their receipts, which included—in addition to 850 fathoms of wampum—this miscellany: "50 double hands of powder, one hundred bars of lead, 20 axes, 20 coats . . . four barrels of beer, two pair of breeches, two ankers of liquor (about 32 gallons) or something equivalent, and three trooper's coats." Ten years later, by the additional payment of "two guns, three coats and 13 kans of rum" the settlers secured a deed all the way to the top of Orange Mountain.

By then "Our Town on the Pesayak" had changed its name from Milford to Newark (New Work, incidentally,

(This is the seventh of a series of articles dealing with New Jersey's 21 counties, sketching their past and present with, now and then, a peek into their future. The counties will be considered in alphabetical order each week. Next Sunday: Gloucester County.)

rather than New Ark). Its growth had been quickened from the start by the arrival of Rev. Abram Pierson and his flock from Branford, Conn., who demanded and got an agreement that only members of "some or other of the Congregational churches" could vote, hold office or attain chief military trust.

NEWARK was a compact town by 1682, when the East Jersey Legislature established Essex County. Laid out around Broad and Market streets, the village had a church, "an ordinary (inn) for the entertainment of travelers," a ferryman, a town drummer, a corn mill and a saw mill (which Thomas Davis was permitted to build after agreeing that "he shall let any

of the inhabitants have boards as cheap as others and before strangers"). Still, Newark life was primitive enough; the killing of wolves and bears was encouraged and rewarded by bounty.

The few who pushed beyond the village limits by 1700 found the Dutch had already come over from Bergen County to settle along Second River (Belleville) and in West Essex, particularly in the sprawling meadowland where the Passaic River looped in a broad arc to form "Horse Neck."

Slowly Newarkers spread outward. Sons of original colonists led the movement up the mountains, where settlement was on a highly personal basis—proof of which lies in early vil-

lage names: Speertown (Upper Montclair), Cranetown (Bloomfield), Morehousetown (Livingston), Doddtown (East Orange), Camptown (Irvington) and Williamstown and Freemantown (both West Orange).

So many had gathered on the Orange Mountain slopes that "The Mountain Society" established itself in 1719 to build a church. Farmers prospered, particularly because their apple orchards produced top-grade cider and vinegar (and if a goodly bit of the cider ripened into wonderful "Jersey Lightning," so much the merrier).

THUS, when the East Jersey Proprietors in 1745 challenged the land claims of farmers living in "Big Piece" and "Little Piece" meadows, West

Essex stiffened. The law clamped Nehemiah Baldwin into Newark jail in 1745 as a lesson, but 300 rioters from the "back settlement" smashed into the jail and freed him. A similar riot in 1746 convinced the Proprietors that they were in the wrong territory.

Newarkers smiled genteely at the impetuous farmers. The town had grown with some dignity by 1746, despite the bitterness generated when Colonel Josiah Ogden broke away from Old First Church because Old First objected to his harvesting wheat on a Fall Sunday in 1733, rather than let it be ruined by rain. Ogden and several followers helped found Trinity Church soon after.

Controversy split the village. Old First finally brought 20-year-old Rev. Aaron Burr to Newark in 1736 to soothe wounded spirits. He succeeded admirably, and his leadership was responsible for the choice of Newark in 1748 as the location of the College of New Jersey, transferred from Elizabeth after the death of Jonathan Dickinson. Mr. Burr became the second president and led the college through pioneer days until it moved permanently to Princeton in 1756 and became Princeton College. His son, Aaron Burr Jr. (later Vice President of the United States), was born in Newark.

ESSEX COUNTY had prosperity enough in 1776 to provoke serious internal dissension over the Revolution. Wealthy farmers like Caleb Hetfield, large landowner in West Essex (in the region now marking his memory as "Hetfield Swamp"), openly supported the British. Newark had considerable Tory spirit among its 1,000 inhabitants; discord split neighbors and friends—even families.

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MR. TREAT'S BARGAIN



Essex County Court House, built in 1907, replacing structure erected in 1837. In foreground is Gutzon Borglum's famous Lincoln statue. Ex-President Theodore Roosevelt spoke at dedication in 1910.



This Fairmount Cemetery monument marks last resting place of town's early inhabitants. Robert Treat is buried in Connecticut.



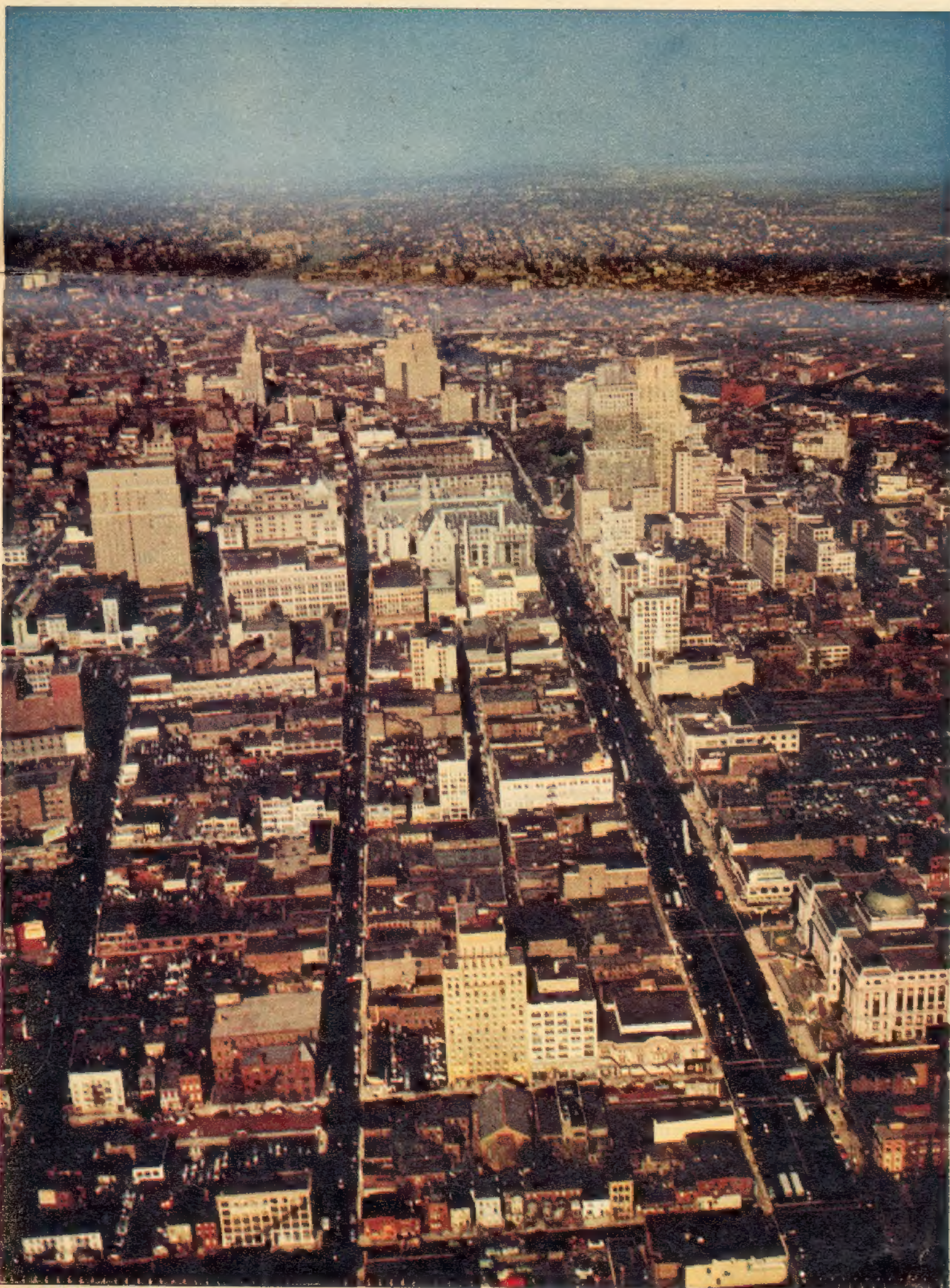
Essex County has kept stride with New Jersey's other counties in postwar home building boom.

with most construction in western fringe. This typical small-home development is in Livingston.



Grover Cleveland was only President in this Caldwell dwelling in Newark.

ESSEX COUNTY



Looking down on central Newark from the air, with curling Passaic River at the upper right.

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So, when General Washington led his bewildered troops into Newark from Hackensack on November 22, 1776, the reception failed to cheer the soldiers. Thomas Paine began to write "The Crisis" while sitting in a Newark park, saddened by the knowledge that the "Summer soldier and sunshine patriot" had already begun to desert the American cause.

Lord Cornwallis leisurely entered North Newark on November 28 at almost precisely the same time that Washington left the southern limits. Cornwallis presumed victory, paused in Newark while Washington slipped across state to regroup his riddled legions.

Essex County's well-ordered farms endured the merciless attention of foraging parties and punitive sorties. On the night of January 25, 1780, a group of British soldiers and Tory allies swooped into Newark and burned the academy. Returning to New York, they stopped by the house of anti-Tory Justice Joseph Hedden and forced him to accompany them across the frozen meadows. Justice Hedden died within a few months from illness brought on by that night.

FOUNDATIONS for industrial Essex developed quickly after the war—in about 1785 James Condit set up Orange's first hat factory and at the same time Moses N. Combs started producing shoes commercially in Newark. Tanning had been important in Newark almost from the start, because water from streams gushing off the hill and down to the swamp south of Broad street proved ideal for the process. Many tanners located in "The Swamp" but it took Combs to change Newark shoemaking from a strictly local enterprise to a far-flung commercial proposition. Others emulated Combs, of course, and within 20 years the town became celebrated for the fine shoes which left by the wagon-load for New York, Philadelphia and Savannah.

Newark wasn't exactly a metropolis. Indeed, Essex County's total population of 20,000 in 1800 lagged behind Sussex County. West Essex was highly rural; cattle and sheep on their way to Newark market stirred the dust in the narrow mountain passes and met swine being driven westward to Summer rooting along the Passaic River at West Caldwell.

Dutch traditions lingered in Bloomfield and Speertown, where storekeepers spoke both Dutch and English. Wagons rolled over county roads constantly in the Fall, bringing farm products eastward from Morris and

Sussex counties westward to the

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Although not generally known as farming county, Essex still has plenty of truck farms, fruit orchards and dairies. Here, gently shaded fall foliage forms background for Livingston man of soil.

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Color photos by Porter, Johnston.

Most impressive view of Essex County is from atop Eagle Rock in West Orange. Spreading before viewer are the Oranges and Newark, with city's skyline at top center.



LEFT: Air view of ship channel at Port Newark, now operated by Port of New York Authority, center of the city's maritime activity. ABOVE: Newark's Branch Brook Park, one of Essex County Park System's lovely reservations.

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ESSEX COUNTY

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descendants were augmented by steady streams of Irish and Germans entering the city, the latter to work in the breweries (although, interestingly enough, it was a Scotchman, Peter Ballantine, who established the city's first large-scale brewery in 1840 after he bought the small brewery General John Cummings had started in 1803).

Progress in the city, however, meant dissatisfaction in the hinterlands. Farmers felt city folk who discussed such things as gas lights in the streets and watchmen "by day and by night" were daft enough without expecting farms to pay taxes for such goings-on. Essex County slowly began to break up into separate municipalities as a consequence.

Orange split from Newark in 1806, Bloomfield Township became independent in 1812, Clinton Township broke away in 1835. Then, like a cell dividing as life develops, these in turn split up. Belleville cut away from Bloomfield in 1839, Irvington from Clinton in 1852 and Millburn from Springfield in 1857 (at the time all of Union County divided from Essex). Later, Montclair seceded from Bloomfield in 1868 when the latter refused to bond a railroad venture.

Division proceeded briskly in Orange Township after Orange incorporated as a town in 1860—thus gaining the right to spend money for such "frills" as police, street improvement, school development and other municipal departments. Orange's outlying regions decided they wanted no part of the subsequent taxes. South Orange became a separate village in 1861, East Orange and West Orange both incorporated in 1863—satisfied that they had both frustrated modernization and saved money.

NEWARK problems mounted when the Civil War shattered the tremendous markets the city had built up with the South in boots and shoes, carriages, clothing, saddles and harness. Leather men in the "Swamp" sulked in bitterness over the loss of their markets below the Mason-Dixon line.

Yet the city and county rallied to the cause (possibly because the "Swamp" found Union war contracts every bit as lucrative as Southern peacetime contracts). President Lincoln received a tremendous welcome when he visited Newark in February, 1861; a crowd of 25,000 jammed the streets to greet him, despite a lively snowstorm.

Brigadier General Theodore Runyon of Newark (later mayor and state chancellor) led 3,000 armed New Jersey troops into Washington, the first fully outfitted soldiers to reach the capital. Back home, the Hewes and Phillips Iron Works provided every one of its men who entered service with a blanket and revolver, paid full salaries to volunteers and kept their jobs open. Dr. Marcus L. Ward led a successful movement to have a 1,400-bed Army hospital opened in the city.

ESSEX COUNTY showed 143,839 people in the 1870 census, with 105,000 of those living in bustling Newark. The city at this time began to assume its "melting pot" character—increasing numbers of Italian and Polish immigrants streamed in to join the Irish, the Germans and descendants of "first families." More than 45,000 people labored in Newark (including an estimated 15,000 people sewing garments in their homes), with shoes, carriages and buggies and jewelry pacing the industrial life. In its pride Newark staged a memorable 1872 industrial exhibit in the skating



Essex is now 11th most populous county in the United States. Until early 19th Century, Newark Township covered whole county.

rink to show off the city's "Made in Newark" might.

Many felt that the one man who would have most enjoyed the exhibit would have been Seth Boyden, who had died in 1870. Boyden came to Newark from New England as a young man and in 1818 produced the first patent leather in the United States. He announced the successful manufacture of malleable iron in 1826 and in the 1830s built locomotives and steam machinery. His discoveries gained Newark's "Uncommercial Inventor" little, however; in 1855 he moved to Hilton (near Maplewood) and lived as a poor farmer. There he perfected the amazing Hilton strawberry, which brought \$1 a quart—to others, since Boyden gave away his plants.

Inventors found a fertile atmosphere in Essex County. Thomas Alva Edison moved from Menlo Park to open a research laboratory in West Orange in 1887 and built a phonograph works there between 1887 and 1890. John Wesley Hyatt's invention of celluloid in 1870 gave Newark an important industry overnight and D. Edward Weston's pioneering in electrical instruments in the 1870s led to another important Newark firm.

Newark's industrial growth was accompanied by the growth of its banking and insurance companies. Banking dated from 1804, when the Newark Banking & Insurance Co. was founded in a private house on a shaky capital of only \$40,000. Early days of major insurance companies held equal peril; Mutual Benefit started in 1845 without even the \$300 to pay for its charter. Thirty years later John F. Dryden's pioneering in industrial insurance met with little financial support, yet he founded the Prudential Insurance Co. in 1875 and watched it grow rapidly.

INDUSTRY had a more limited growth in the suburbs. Orange's hat makers celebrated 100 years of their enterprise in 1892 by turning out 400,000 dozen hats in 21 firms, but a 1909 strike over the use of union labels doomed the suburban industry. Some hat makers moved to Millburn

after the Civil War; eight firms prospered there in the 1880s, only to suffer eventually the same fate as the Orange plants.

Destiny reserved the suburbs for residential living, although until the coming of the trolleys in the 1890s that destiny remained dormant. Several noted early real estate developments prospered (and attracted the prosperous)—Llewellyn S. Haskell's "Llewellyn Park" grew after its establishment in 1857 and Stewart Hartshorn's "Short Hills" met acclaim after he announced it in 1877. The wealthy bought in Benjamin Small's Summer colony at St. Cloud and such noted people as General George B. McClellan bought in Dr. Marcy's development on "The Ridge" in West Orange.

Before they attracted home buyers the trolleys opened the Orange mountaintops to Sunday frolickers at Eagle Rock and Cable Lake. Thousands of Newarkers rode trolleys up to Vailsburg in the 1890s to picnic. Other thousands joined in German songfests at Becker's Grove in Irvington (where "My Old Kentucky Home" was sung in German).

Significantly, at this time the Essex County Park Commission was formed (in 1895) to preserve for the public some natural beauty spots (Eagle Rock, South Mountain, Branch Brook, for example). Formation of the commission was exceptionally progressive, since at the time the only other place in the nation which had anything of the sort was cultured Boston.

THE automobile—rather than inflexible railroads and trolleys—finally metamorphosed Essex County farmland into homeland. At Century's turn only Orange and East Orange had more than 10,000 inhabitants, with industrial Orange's 15,000 population the largest outside of Newark. More than two-thirds of Essex County's 359,000 people still lived in Newark in 1900; it was just too hard to get even as far out as Vailsburg on the trolleys.

Automobiles brought demands for improved roads—and more suburban dispute. In spreading Caldwell Township, for example, arguments over the

disposition of road funds dissolved the once huge township between 1898 and 1908 into the smaller municipalities of North Caldwell, West Caldwell, Caldwell Borough, Verona, Cedar Grove and Essex Fells. In the division the house where Grover Cleveland had been born in 1837 and where he had lived for four years stayed within Caldwell Borough limits.

Through its first 240 years Newark had struggled along without a real port, but in 1907 the Board of Trade announced optimistically that a port was coming. Its predication started to assume reality in 1915 when a 30-foot channel was dredged in the Meadows and the port became an actuality during World War I with government help. Nearby, in the 1920s Newark Airport grew in the Meadows, too, making the marshland more useful than it had been since cattle of the early settlers roamed through the marsh hay.

NEWARK'S skyline jutted upward in the late 1920s and early 1930s, climaxed finally by construction of the 34-story Raymond Commerce Building in 1930 and the 35-story National Newark and Essex Building in 1931. The city embraced new ideas—radio, for example, by welcoming Radio Station WJZ, second in the nation. Radio's impact on the county and nation became indelible with the first broadcast of a World Series game in 1921 from Newark's WJZ. A year later WOR began broadcasting from L. Bamberger & Co.

Everything spurted in Newark in the 1920s. Factories boomed, banks and insurance companies expanded, great department stores became the mecca of suburban housewives. That made the depression even more cruel, since more than 600 factories closed their doors and business lagged. That is at the moment behind, of course, and today Newark continues to rank among top cities in the nation in diversity of manufactured products (and more than 50 of its industries earn more than \$1,000,000 apiece annually).

Essex County's economic life centers in Newark, but the city's population has become almost stable in the last 20 years. People prefer to live elsewhere, and rapid transportation makes that preference possible. The once-impregnable mountains and valleys to the west are covered with homes and shopping centers. Many of the towns also have welcomed research laboratories and modern factories, so that suburban economic life is on a far broader base than mere commuter income.

AIRPLANES, railroads, super highways and trucks link Essex County and the world. The Greenness of Treat's Meadows is cinder-stained; the 20th Century industrial smells have replaced the odors of apple blossoms which wafted from the mountains in May, 1666. Closely packed slum dwellings are in sad contrast to the six acres of land allotted early Newark settlers. Essex County today is the nation's 11th most populous county, considering New York City as a unit, with nearly 1,000,000 population.

It's of little moment to wonder what Mr. Treat would think of 1952's Essex County; he probably wouldn't like it. Yet, in his New England sagacity, he would unquestionably agree that he had bought a bit of a bargain.

COVER PHOTO

A photographer sets up his tripod to catch a sweeping view of Essex County from Eagle Rock. Washington Rock, South Mountain Reservation, is also noted observatory.